

Subcommittee on
**International Terrorism
and Nonproliferation**

Chairman Ed Royce, 40th District California

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Eric Cullen (202) 225.4111

March 2, 2006

Statement of Chairman Ed Royce
Assessing 'Rights' Under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty

WASHINGTON, DC -- Congressman Ed Royce (CA-40) issued the following statement to open the House Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation hearing "Assessing Rights Under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty:"

The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is the foundation of our efforts to check the spread of nuclear weapons. Simply stated, it says that countries, apart from the U.S. and four others, will not acquire or develop nuclear weapons. Many believe, rightly so, that the NPT has been very important in stemming nuclear weapons proliferation. In the 1960s, when the Treaty was negotiated, there were dire predictions that dozens of countries would soon possess the Bomb. Instead, several countries have given up their nuclear weapons programs, and many more with the capability, have refrained from developing nuclear weapons, at least in part because of their NPT commitments. While the NPT is not our sole nonproliferation tool, it's a very important one.

Today the most pressing nuclear challenges we face are North Korea and Iran. North Korea pulled out of the NPT and announced that it has nuclear weapons. Iran, while threatening to pull out, hasn't yet, and it claims the right to enrich uranium, a process it's working at, and that comes with a nuclear weapons option. An Iran with this sensitive aspect of the nuclear fuel cycle is an Iran only a few steps away from having a nuclear weapon, with all the dire consequences. The U.S. and our European partners have rightly rejected Iran's right to develop nuclear fuel making technology, pointing to the fact that the IAEA Board of Governors has found Iran in non-compliance with its safeguards agreement. For nearly 20 years, Iran systematically deceived the IAEA inspectors, concealing its nuclear efforts.

A shortcoming of the NPT is that countries like Iran have the right, most believe, to develop fissile material so long as it's safeguarded. Iran is aggressively campaigning throughout the world, claiming that the U.S. and the EU-3 are violating this right, winning some sympathy. My concern is that over time, maybe not that far in the future, Iran could come clean with the IAEA, win international support, and successfully assert this "right" to develop its nuclear industry, including producing nuclear fuel. Then Iran

could either cheat or withdraw from the Treaty to develop nuclear weapons. Either way, Iran becomes a nuclear weapons state and the NPT will have failed in a critical case.

President Bush, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and many others concerned with the spread of nuclear weapons have recognized this NPT shortcoming. President Bush has said that the NPT "has a loophole which has been exploited by nations such as North Korea and Iran. These regimes are allowed to produce nuclear material that can be used to build bombs under the cover of civilian nuclear programs."

During a hearing last year on the NPT Review Conference, some Members of the Subcommittee, including me, raised this issue of what nuclear activities are permitted under the NPT, and under what conditions. While there was to be discussion of this shortcoming at the Review Conference, not much was done. Today we'll have a chance to further this conversation, hearing from some experts who challenge this "right," to different degrees.

This is more than an academic exercise. The stakes in the showdown with North Korea and Iran couldn't be higher. Has Iran lost its "right" to produce nuclear weapons material because of its evasiveness, or is its "right" dubious in the first place? How might we push back this "right"? We need a good understanding of the rules of the game as we confront these countries. And I'll remind Members that this Subcommittee will be dealing with the historic nuclear energy sharing agreement that President Bush and Indian Prime Minister Singh finalized today.

This discussion is an assessment of the NPT's fundamental value. While I'm a Treaty supporter, we need to ask what its worth if it lends legitimacy and political support to the nuclear weapons aspirations of hostile regimes. The intention today is to shed light on this complex, yet critical issue.

###